

At 95, Carol Stream man is the buzz of Illinois

Lawrence DuBose
named beekeeper
of the year in state

BY JOAN CARY
Chicago Tribune

Beekeeper Lawrence DuBose watched out the window of the Kline Creek Farm's honey house in West Chicago and there was only rain, not a person in sight.

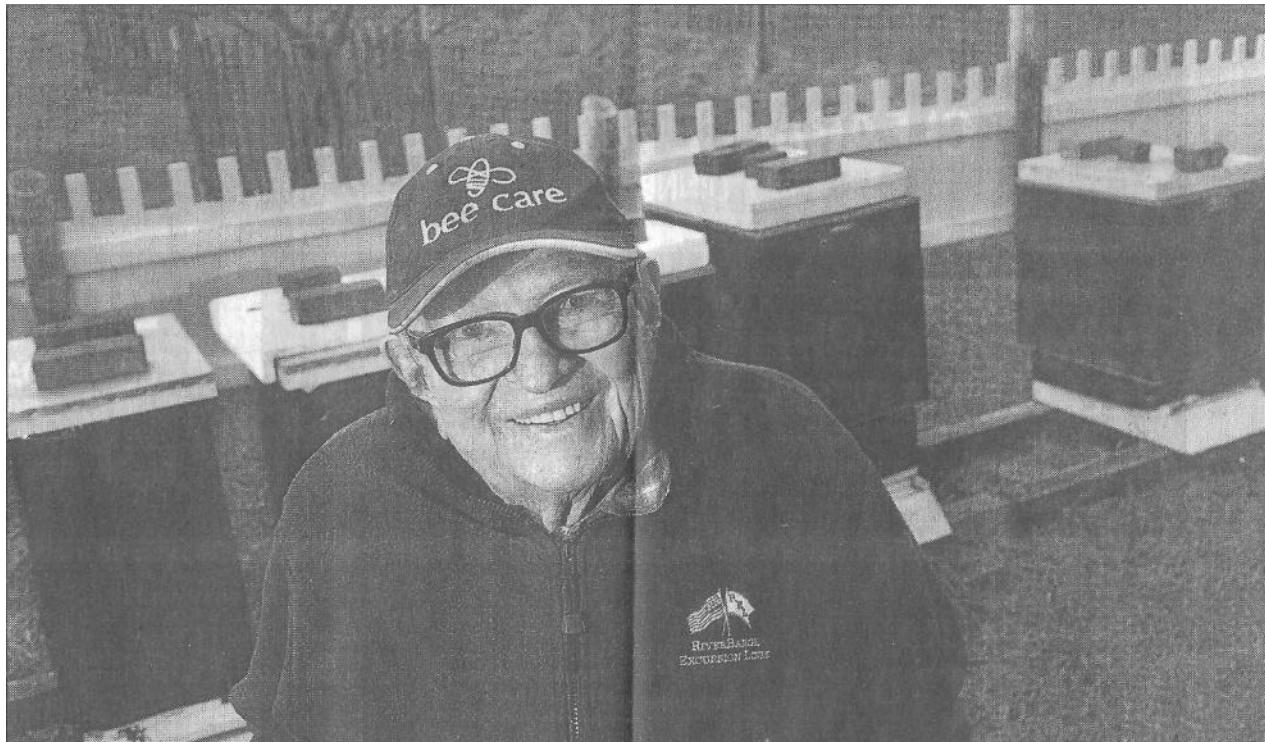
If the weather wasn't keeping visitors away on that dreary recent afternoon, Sunday football or holiday shopping might have.

"I don't really expect to see anybody today. But I'll be here," said the 95-year-old DuBose, who keeps 20 hives at the farm and reports to the honey house every day, though technically he is only scheduled to be there on Sunday afternoons.

DuBose committed more than 30 years ago to keeping bees at this historic farm, which is part of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, and he intends to stick with it.

His personal commitment to the cause is just one reason why he was named Beekeeper of the Year by the Illinois State Beekeepers Association, a group that coordinates local beekeeping activity, promotes interest in honeybees and encourages good beekeeping practices in the state.

"He's knowledgeable. He's dedicated to the cause. He helps others learn the trade. He's quite a man ... a philanthropic beekeeper," said Aurora beekeeper



JAMES C. SVEHLA/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Lawrence DuBose has kept bees at West Chicago's Kline Creek Farm, in the DuPage Forest Preserve District, for 30 years.

Charles Lorence, who nominated DuBose for the honor.

Lorence said he believes the award is long overdue.

A retired engineer with a doctorate in civil engineering, DuBose started keeping bees in south Texas at age 12, and other than a break for college and World War II, he has consistently tended bees most of his life.

"Well, I just like honey" the Carol Stream resident says when asked why. "That's about all there is to it."

DuBose went to the farm in 1984 when asked by the farm manager to check a barn that was being re-

habbed. He suggested to the manager that bees be a part of the operation.

The manager asked if he would take care of them and DuBose agreed. There were many feral colonies of bees then, he later wrote in his self-published book, "A Beekeeper's Journal." He caught a swarm and brought them to the farm.

Now DuBose and his volunteers tend 20 hives in the farm's bee yard. They process the honey in the 700-square-foot honey house that was built in 2010 and named for DuBose's wife, Wanda, who died in 2006.

DuBose contributed

\$100,000 toward construction of the \$255,000 structure, according to forest preserve records.

Winter days are quiet and he stays in the honey house, even when the temperatures are above 50 and the bees are active outside.

Then on a calm, sunny day in early February when the temperature is right, he will open the bee boxes to see if the bees are short on food. If they don't have enough honey to live on until spring, he will sprinkle granulated sugar in the hive, he said.

He does not wear a bee suit or gloves when working in the yard but does wear a

bee veil to protect his face and neck. "Once in a while I smash a bee and it stings me," he said. "I'd be stupid not to wear a bee veil. I don't want to lose an eye."

One of his best years at the farm was 2003 when 10 hives produced 1,300 pounds of honey, more than three times the state average, he recalled. There were many years when the harvest exceeded 1,000 pounds, but there have also been disappointing years when honey production was down or bees died.

Last summer they collected more than 400 pounds of honey, purposely leaving more oilive hives to

get stressed bees through the winter.

Whether the honey crop has been good or bad, DuBose is eager to educate others on the need to control chemicals, pesticides and insecticides that he believes are directly related to the country's declining bee population.

The attention brought to their struggle has definitely sparked public interest in keeping bees, he said, and it's increased the number of questions that come in from new beekeepers.

"There's an ecclesiastical zeal to save the species now," Lorence said. "Everybody wants to be a beekeeper today?"

But some will find beekeeping to be a short-lived interest, he said. Others will stick with it.

DuBose is well-known for the option he chose. He is probably the oldest member of the state association and has logged more beekeeping time than any of the others, said membership director Steve Petrilli in Springfield.

Petrilli said their membership hovered around 900 for many years but has increased to more than 1,600 in the last three or four years.

"I feel very fortunate to receive the honor from them," DuBose said. "I drive here every day and I know I've been very fortunate."

But he did miss one Sunday in 2015, he said. "I think I might have missed Easter Sunday."

Joan Cary is a freelance writer.